8 August 2000
English
Original: French

Committee on Conferences
Substantive session of 2000

Draft report

Addendum

Rapporteur: Mr. Peter **Van De Velde** (Belgium)

I. Calendar of conferences and meetings

C. Utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities

3. Improved utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi

Introduction and overview

1. In section B of its resolution 54/248, the General Assembly expressed concern that the conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi were still underutilized; reiterated its call for their better utilization; and urged all subsidiary bodies of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Commission on Human Settlements, and encouraged Member States, intergovernmental bodies and regional and other major groupings to increase their use of the conference facilities at Nairobi. In paragraphs 14 to 17 of the same resolution, the Assembly reiterated its request to the Secretary-General to assist the aforementioned bodies in improving the situation, and requested him to report to it at its fifty-fifth session on the actions taken to that end.

2. As a proactive measure to facilitate greater utilization of the Nairobi conference facilities, the Assembly, in section B, paragraph 24, of resolution 54/248, decided to establish a permanent interpretation service at the United Nations Office at Nairobi no later than January 2001.

3. As an integral part of its 431st meeting, on 8 August 2000, the Committee on Conferences arranged a videoconference, in which the Chief of Conference Services of the United Nations Office at Nairobi, the Officer-in-Charge of Administrative and Common Services and Chief of the Translation and Editorial Service of the United Nations Office at Vienna, the Acting Director of the Conference Services Division of the United Nations Office at Geneva and other relevant managers at the

00-59834 (E)

respective duty stations participated. The Committee also considered the matter at its 432nd meeting, on 8 August 2000.

4. During the videoconference, the Chief of Conference Services of the United Nations Office at Nairobi introduced the report of the Secretary-General on improved utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi (A/55/259). The report described the initial steps that had been taken to implement the Assembly's decision to establish a permanent interpretation service at the United Nations Office at Nairobi and projected the effect of the creation of such a service as a factor in attracting more meeting activity to that duty station from 2001 onwards. The United Nations Office at Nairobi welcomed the close cooperation between it and the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services in implementing the decision of the General Assembly.

Discussion

5. Members of the Committee sought additional information, *inter alia*, as to the types of organizations and non-United Nations agencies that had approached the United Nations Office at Nairobi for the use of its conference services; whether the proposed structure of the staffing table for interpreters, that is, the fact that most appointments would be at the P-3 level, had had a negative impact on current efforts to attract candidates for the posts and the rate at which those posts were being filled; what the experience of the Office had been with regard to the availability of temporary assistance, given the overall reduction in budgetary allocations to conference services; whether any obstacles had been encountered in making the centre's facilities available for use on a commercial basis; whether the proposed establishment of a permanent interpretation service at the United Nations Office at Nairobi had led to any changes in the relations between the Office and the host Government; and as to whether the decision to de-link conference services from administration at the Office contravened the recent recommendation of the Committee for Programme and Coordination to the General Assembly that closer links be developed between conference services at duty stations away from Headquarters and the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services.

6. Replying to the questions raised, the Chief of Conference Services at the United Nations Office at Nairobi said that the news about the proposed establishment of a permanent interpretation service at the Office had generated a great deal of interest from potential users of the service and that specific enquiries had been received from a number of intergovernmental bodies and private sector entities. On the question of the filling of the interpreters' posts, he had been assured by Headquarters that most of them would be filled by the end of 2000. The level of the posts offered did not constitute an obstacle to their being filled, since the Office was prepared to launch the service with candidates from the United Nations roster who had passed the competitive exam. Because of the charge-back system currently in place, the Office already had considerable experience in making its facilities available for use on a commercial basis. The establishment of a permanent interpretation service would have no legal implications for the host country agreement. The recommendation of the Committee for Programme and Coordination to the General Assembly was consistent with the current restructuring of the administrative and conference services at the United Nations Office at Nairobi.

7. Clarification was sought from the representative of the Secretariat as to whether, from a legal point of view, commercial use of the conference facilities at Nairobi might create a conflict with the diplomatic functions of the Office. The representative of the Secretariat pointed out that the main non-United Nations users of the facilities were environment-related treaty bodies. However, he undertook to provide a fuller response to the question at a later stage.

Conclusions and recommendations

8. The Committee noted with satisfaction that the creation of a permanent interpretation service at Nairobi offered great potential for Nairobi as a venue for United Nations conferences and meetings, and that the close cooperation between the Office and the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services in implementing the decision of the General Assembly was commendable.

9. The Committee took note of the statement in the report of the Secretary-General that further reporting on the impact of the creation of the interpretation service would be carried out as part of future reports on the utilization rate of conference facilities at Nairobi.

10. The Committee took note with appreciation of the efforts being made by the United Nations Office at Nairobi to attract more meetings to its facilities.